

## SUN TZU AWARD

(Complete and submit to your respective Platoon Commander upon finishing a book on the Commandant's Reading List)

### United States Marine Corps Commandant's Professional Reading List Discussion Guide *Updated 14 DEC 2012*

This guide is intended to help Marines think about and discuss the books they read. All answers or responses should be embraced as *relevant*; there is no single right answer. All Sun Tzu Award submissions will be reviewed and boarded at the end of each month.

Date: 20140913

Rank: [REDACTED]

Name: [REDACTED]

Platoon/Section: [REDACTED]

Book: The Art of War

Author: Sun Tsu

1. In as few words as possible, what is this book about?

The fundamental elements of competition – military or otherwise – and the necessary considerations and decisions a leader should make to achieve victory

2. What made you want to read it?

The Art of War is popularly considered one of the seminal works of military theory and strategy. As a member of a war fighting organization, I felt academically and professionally obligated to read this book.

3. Did it live up to your expectations? Why? Why not?

Very much so: I expected a primer about military leadership fundamentals, from an organizational point of view, and military principles for various types of warfare (e.g., attrition, maneuver, etc.). I was pleasantly surprised by how heavily this work emphasized wit over force as the most potent weapon in the arsenal of a commander at any leadership level.

4. Did you learn anything new? If so, what?

The book was less about presenting novel or new information, per se, and more about inspiring novel, creative, and multi-faceted approaches to planning and executing military operations. "The Art of War" helped me to understand the conduct of warfare more holistically and with greater comprehension of the nuances.

5. Which part of the book did you find most interesting?

The final chapter, "The Use of Spies," has particular relevance to me professionally as an aspiring 2671. Of specific interest was how applicable the fundamentals of intelligence operations and the role they play in warfare

continue to be after over two millennia. Chapter IV, “Weak Points and Strong,” concerned disinformation and other aspects of information and “soft power” operations, which related to one of my concentrations in grad school.

6. Did this book inspire you to want to do more research on the subject? Why? Why not?

I intend to read works by other eastern philosophers, such as Confucius and Lao Tzu, and seek out the other six of Seven Military Classics from classical China. Additionally, I would like to read the lessons by military leaders who were inspired by Sun Tzu, including Mao Tzedong, Che Guevara, and General Colin Powell. I am curious to gain more insight into what inspired Sun Tze and also about how his lessons transpired through the conflicts and uprisings of the last century.

7. Would you recommend it to a friend or another Marine? Why? Why not?

I would recommend this book to anyone as a thought exercise, if for no other reason. Other Marines should read it for this reason and because it is, in a sense, a manual for their own success as war fighters, regardless of MOS.

8. Does the subject of this book affect your life? If so, how? If no, why not?

As one in student status (and already married, therefore unable to apply the principles to dating) this book will likely not be immediately relevant to my daily life. However, I intend to reread “The Art of War” periodically throughout my career to keep the lessons fresh and at the fore in my mind.

9. What evidence does the author use to support their ideas?

Sun Tzu draws on his own experiences throughout his career as a military commander and also references historic military commander events and engagements during China’s Warring States period.

10. Are the issues raised in the book controversial? Why?

Some military leaders (or leaders in other fields) might disagree with Sun Tzu’s approach, especially with his extremely calculated – even mathematical – perception of the battle space, but, for the most part, this book is more thought-provoking than it is controversial. Leaders from the western generals to eastern revolutionaries have subscribed to “The Art of War.”

11. Does the author offer solutions to the problems raised in the book? How probable is their success? Can you think of additional solutions?

This book is purely about solutions to problems, from the tactical to the strategic, and takes into account the range of factors that can ensure or prevent success. Nothing in conflict is sure, but applying Sun Tzu’s lessons would arguably maximize the chances for success. I would update “The Art of War” with chapters about applying special operations/unconventional warfare and cyber to the commander’s overall calculus.

12. If you were to talk with the author, what would you ask him or her?

I would be interested to hear Sun Tzu's perceptions of and solutions to the unique set of considerations associated with unconventional/guerrilla warfare. I would further ask for/about his critique of the GWOT as well as his approach(es) to the crisis surrounding ISIS.

13. Have you read the author's other books? Can you discern a similarity (in theme, writing style, structure, etc.) between them, or are they completely different?

I have not been able to locate any other works by Sun Tzu, but I have read similar books, namely Clausewitz's "On War" and Miyamoto Musashi's "The Book of Five Rings." All three deal with the conduct of warfare, but their perspectives vary. Clausewitz evaluates conflict through a political and strategic lens as opposed to strategy but from a largely tactical and individualist point of view.

14. After reading this book, have your views on the subject changed? Why? Why not?

My views have changed in the sense that I now consider warfare more broadly and less concretely; it is a single, fluid process consisting of numerous tightly entwined areas of consideration. Sun Tzu expresses these elements in independent chapters as if they were discrete topics, though the overall message of the book is actually that all the elements are organs in a single organism, not multiple organisms working towards a shared set of goals.

15. Why should Marines read this book?

Marines, first and foremost, are war fighters: "every Marine a rifleman." Additionally, Marines are continually expected to accomplish their missions and be the US's vanguard despite having fewer resources, especially as resources become more limited in general. As such, it is crucial that Marines understand and apply the force-multiplying natures of intellect, wit, and ingenuity to the battlefield, literally and figuratively. I believe and strive to embody the Greek historian and Commander Thucydides' conclusion after observing the Peloponnesian War: "The nation that draws too wide a distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools." "The Art of War" serves as a bridge between the two and promotes well-roundedness in the individual and in the force overall.